

Civil Service Reform in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Local Government Change in Mexico and the United States

*Cecilia Cadena, Raymond Cox, Martha Laura Hernández,
Ma. Esther Morales and Ramona Ortega-Liston**

80

1 of 31

These "citizen advocates" are as ready to fight City Hall, as they are to support it.

The period from the late 1970s through the early 1990s brought a reaction to the new public administration. The work of politically conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation sought to re-emphasize *executive leadership* as the core concept in personnel management. These groups reintroduced concepts of bureaucracy from the 1930s, when an earlier generation of academics sought to reshape the bureaucracy in support of a President with whom they agreed politically and ideologically. This viewpoint (in contrast to the 1930s efforts) explicitly rejects the concept of neutral competence. The "proper" role of the bureaucrat is to seek the interests of the President. This attitude is derived from efforts to distinguish between statutory enactments and regulations. Regulations are deemed nothing more than the embodiment of the discretionary choices of prior administrations.

When, presumably, politics is neglected. At a minimum, the standards by which to judge operations are those of the business firm. These views even call into question the advisability of a career civil service (Devine, 1987; Heatherly and Pines, 1989). This is the political environment within which civil service reform takes place today.

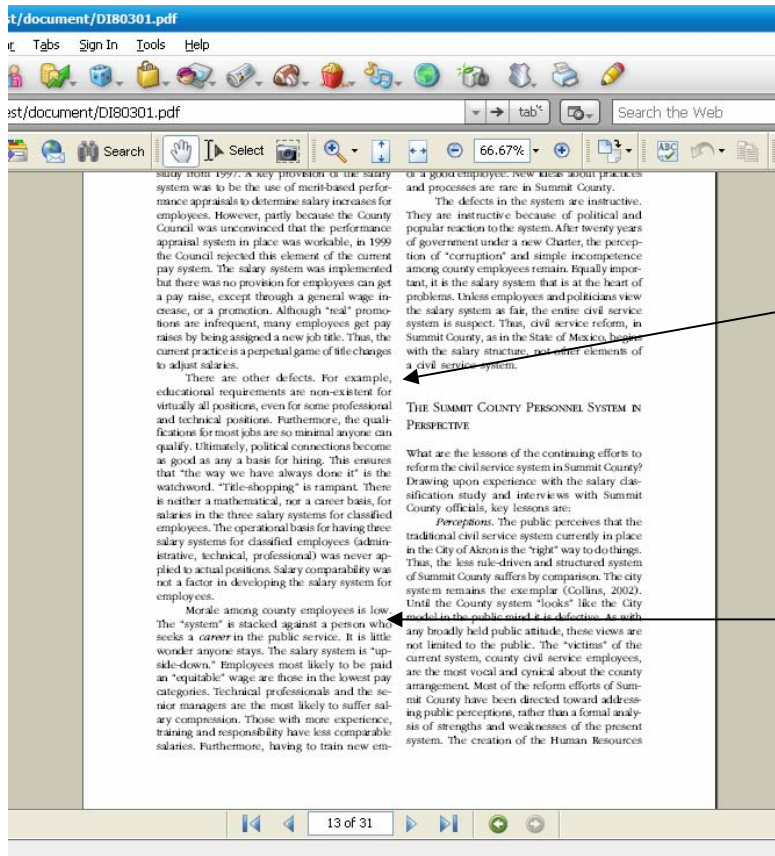
CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN SUMMIT COUNTY³

In 1984 voters of Summit County Ohio approved a significant restructuring of the government of that county. A central feature of the political initiative to approve a new home-rule, Charter was the public and media perception that the civil service system was broken (Clark, 1979). Restructuring ranged beyond changes in civil service.

³ Much of the information presented in this section is derived from a study of the Summit County personnel system by the Department of Public Administration & Urban Studies, The University of Akron (January 2002-May 2003).

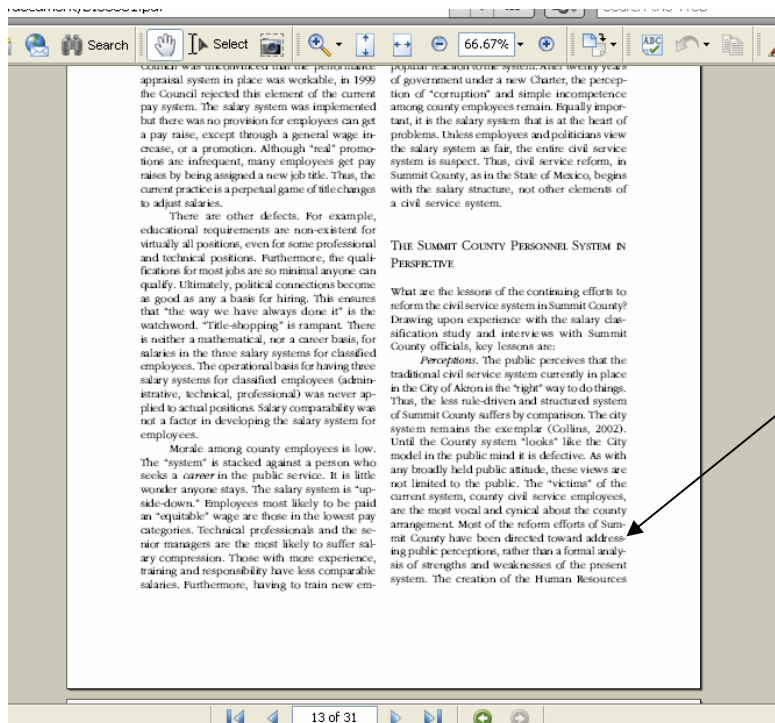
"the civil service system was broken"
And still is!

11 of 31

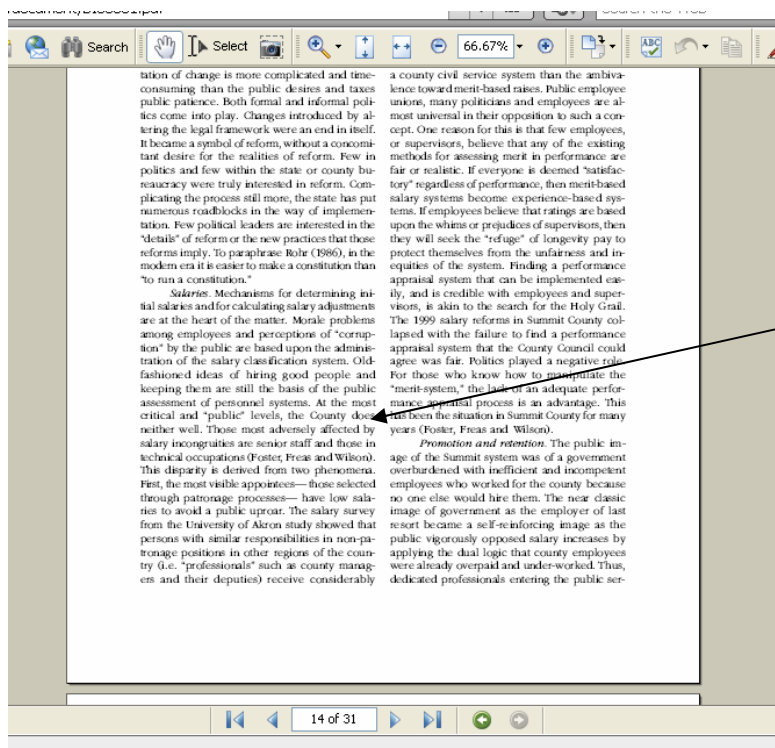


There are other defects. For example, educational requirements are non-existent for virtually all positions, even for some professional and technical positions....Ultimately, political connections become as good as any a basis for hiring.

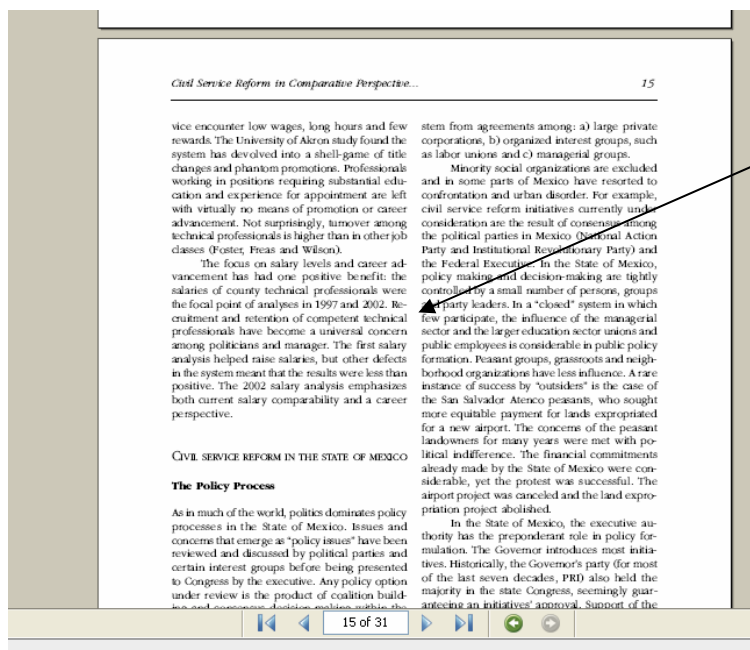
Morale among county employees is low. The "system" is stacked against a person who seeks a career in public service.



Most of the reform efforts of Summit County have been directed toward public perception...



Old-fashioned ideas of hiring good people and keeping them are still the basis of the public assessment of personnel systems. At the most critical and "public" levels, the **County does neither well** (emphasis added)



Recruitment and retention of competent technical professionals have become a universal concern ...